

4. 8. 29

GENTLE JIMMY BROWN

THE BASHFUL BARD OF BART

01.

The Poetry and Personality of a Minstrel of the
Romantic Region of the Octoraro, whose
Fame was Little Known Beyond His
Own Community

A PAPER BY

W. U. HENSEL

READ BEFORE THE LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
JANUARY 8, 1915

PRESS OF
THE NEW ERA PRINTING COMPANY
LANCASTER, PA.

1915

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries



JAMES SCOTT BROWN

GENTLE JIMMY BROWN

THE BASHFUL BARD OF BART

The Poetry and Personality of a Minstrel of the
Romantic Region of the Octoraro, whose
Fame was Little Known Beyond His
Own Community

A PAPER BY

W. U. HENSEL

READ BEFORE THE LANCASTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
JANUARY 8, 1915

PRESS OF
THE NEW ERA PRINTING COMPANY
LANCASTER, PA.

1915

GENTLE JIMMY BROWN.

IF you are driving along a country highway, when a vendue of personal property is in progress, and the crier approaches you with a basketful of books and appeals to you to raise a bid of "three cents for the lot," do not fail to do so. You cannot lose, and several times I have had rare bargains thus thrust upon me.

I was saved about \$12.97 on a copy of Sally Hastings' verse; some day your descendants may thus find Riddle's latest and best; or Nissley's earliest and worst; or even Landis' long-lost Lancaster lyrics may be rescued from some rural garret at less cost than its present sumptuous typography and binding involve.

One fine spring day, some years ago, driving by the Brown homestead, between Nine Points and Andrews' Bridge, in a romantic and beautiful country, over which a sort of poetic spell still lingers, I thus secured a bunch of books at a bargain; when I came to separate them I found the entire lot identical. The title was "The Boquet," conspicuously misspelled on the outer cover, though corrected on the inner page. The volume was published in Lancaster, 1858, by Murray, Young & Co., and the author was James Scott Brown, "native and to the manner born." The book, though published in Lancaster, was printed by C. Sherman & Son, Philadelphia.

The publisher firm, it will be remembered, included William Murray

and Hiram Young. The former had been in the stationery business for quite a while. In 1850, and for several years thereafter, Judd & Murray kept a book store at the second house from the northeast corner of North Queen and Orange streets; the corner was occupied by the owner of the property, F. J. Kramph, the clothier. The Judd & Murray firm was dissolved and became Murray & Stock, the last named having been the County Prothonotary. After a few years Stock sold out to Hiram Young, who had been a clerk for some years in the store and Stock went to Oshkosh, Wis.

Hiram Young later became the owner and publisher of the York Dispatch. He died some years ago and his sons have been running the paper since. James Black, lawyer and Prohibitionist, married William Murray's daughter, and in his old age he came to live with Mr. Black on Duke street, where he died some twenty years ago. In 1856 James Black's office was on East King street, somewhere near the site of the People's National Bank. Our broadly-informed Brother Diffenderfer—to whom I owe the foregoing information and much more—tells me he remembers this fact, because, as secretary of the Fremont Club, of this city, he had frequent occasion to go to his office, where the club often met.

Of the author of this modest little volume of verse, I had never heard, but a copy of the "first" and last edition has been placed since in the local libraries; and others are deposited with those who will see that this memorial of his talents shall not perish from the earth.

His Poetry.

An examination of his lines will show that he has other claims to consideration than the locality of his birth, life and death. The leading poem, which furnishes the title, is in the Wordsworthian strain; it shows that he was a student and lover of nature, of the quiet and peaceful. He liked "bright, morning colors glittering o'er the dew." He heard the echoes and saw the visions of outdoor life:

"The wandering stream's low-murmuring tone,
The wind's deep sigh, the breeze's evening moan,
The wildwood notes that forest songsters sing,
The purple violets of the early Spring,
The shimmering brightness of the fresh young leaves,
The social swallow's gossip 'neath the eaves,
The living colors Evening paints afar,
And the soft, dewy light of vesper star."

War's wild alarums had no call for him. The scarlet thread of armed conflict is not entwined in the woof and web of his silken fabric; the trumpet call to battle had no charm for his muse. He lets her

"Sweetly rest
'Mid beauteous flowers and be with fragrance blest."

But who that has gone down the Octoraro in the early spring will deny descriptive power and genius scarcely inferior to that displayed by Sir Walter Scott's word painting of the Trossachs, to the obscure local author who penned these lines

"The maple, ensign of the Spring, unfurls
A crimson banner where the water purls:—
She crowns the dogwood in bright-spotted snow,
While starred with violets gleams the ground below."

Young, lustrous green the woods
 around assume,
 Which deepens still—a dark, delicious
 gloom,
 The tulip-tree, her cups with honey
 stored,
 Invites the bee to her ambrosial board.
 Incense, from forest temples, pure to
 God,
 Magnolia's flowery censers breathe
 abroad.
 Where chiming waters lonely sing un-
 seen,
 From rock to rock, the laurel, ever
 green,
 Throws o'er the vast, undesecrated
 aisles
 Of sanctuary hills, her blossomy smiles.
 Pure worshippers, in those green
 avenues
 Of the cathedral wood, are flowers,
 whose hues
 Are altar flames, their fragrant in-
 cense given,
 A silent offering, undefiled, to
 Heaven:—
 They in this Minster stand, as they
 have stood,
 The priests and prophets of the tem-
 pled wood.
 The primrose and the daisy deck the
 walk;
 The blue bells hang dark on their pil-
 lared stalk;
 The mosses gray, from trees and rocks
 depend;
 And o'er the streams the azure lilies
 bend.
 The flamy phlox afar in scarlet glows;
 The meadow-pink unfolds, the wind-
 flower blows;
 And numerous shrubs, which scarce
 possess a name,
 On their hill-shrines, enkindle odorous
 flame.
 The humming-bird in green and crim-
 son vest,
 On buzzing wings, works at her mossy
 nest;
 Then o'er the expanse of grass, from
 that to this,
 She gives each blushing flower a flying
 kiss."

Mid Foreign Scenes.

Brown was never abroad. He lived,
 however, in a foreign atmosphere.
 He dreamed of Italy and the numbers
 came:

Rome, Florence, Genoa and Venice,
 Replete with story and romance,
 Defy Oblivion's envious menace,
 Still Tiber, Arno, and thy seas re-
 flect their glance.

Thy glorious minds have hallowed
 made thee,
 Idol and shrine of schoolboy dreams;
 Virgil, Dante and Tasso rayed thee
 With light immortal, which o'er the
 heart's altar streams.

Boccacio and Ariosto,
 And Laura's lover more are
 cherished,
 Than Caesar, or than Caesar's foe,
 Who on that distant shore of Egypt
 lonely perished.

Rome! Brutus' dagger could not save
 thee
 From Slavery's degrading ban,
 But music, painting, sculpture gave
 thee
 A world-wide empire o'er the mind
 and heart of man.

Of Raphael and Alfieri,
 And he, who planned St. Peter's
 dome,
 Fame and Muse are never weary—
 Far mightier conquerors they, than
 Caesars of Old Rome.

Go read the Eternal City's story
 When high in heaven the moon doth
 climb,
 And o'er the Titan ruins hoary,
 Gigantic shadows stalk, upbraiding
 deaf Old Time."

He also built castles in Spain:

Land of the deep blue, sunny sky,
 Of orange flower and citron bloom—
 Proud Mountain Land of beauty why
 Art thou obscured with gloom?

Land of Romance and old Renown,
 Where learned and brave did once
 resort,
 When bright the lustre of thy crown,
 And grand thy haughty court.

Of all thy mighty empire, Spain,
 On which the sun did never set—
 Of the fifth Charles's wide domain,
 Say what is left thee yet?

Where is thy fame, and knightly band,
 Thy honor and quick sense of wrong;
 And where thy strength of arms, thou
 Land
 Of chivalry and song?

Thy sails, which spread on every sea,
 That restless Commerce dare to
 brace,
 And winged the wealth of all to thee,
 Have wasted from the wave.

And of thy gold's unbounded store,
 Which made the nations envy thee,
 What now remains thou must deplore—
 It gilds thy poverty.

Who would have thought so low a fall,
 Thy power and glory could betide;
 For all which now remains—yea, all
 Is but the wreck of pride!

The cost of toil and blood, how vast,
 To drive the Moor across the Straits;
 Still one not of thy soil holds fast
 With iron hand those gates!

Thy cold oppression in those climes,
 Which the World-seeker for thee
 won;
 Thy cruel av'rice, and dark crimes,
 Have thine own self undone.

Spain, still thy mountains and thy
 vales;
 Thy clime with golden sunshine
 warm;
 Thy deeds enshrined in legend tales;
 Lend thee a magic charm.

He heard the voices of the night
 birds. Sheakespeare had first
 sung the field lark's song, and
 Shelly had written his matchless
 "Skylark." Burns immortalized the
 field mouse and from Cowley to Hig-
 ginson, grasshoppers, crickets, butter-
 flies and bumblebees had been im-
 bedded in the amber of poetry; the
 blackbird and beach bird, the crane
 and cuckoo, the eagle (in Tennyson's
 splendid "fragment"); the nightin-
 gale and owl, the oriole and pewee,
 robins and swallows, the wood-dove
 and petrel; and the thrush—Daly's
 noblest offering—had all been "feath-
 ered odes" for songsters; but it was
 left to our own gentle Jimmy Brown
 to sing the long neglected whippoor-
 will.

Spirit of the hill, Whippoorwill!
 All is lonely, dusky still;
 Then that sound starts up quite near,
 Weird-like, loud, sharp and clear,
 That's the rain-drop on the leaves,
 Which the wakeful ear receives;
 For the shower had past away
 Ere the shut of sultry day.
 All is still, how deeply still!
 Hark! the wailing Whippoorwill!
 It is now here; it is now there;—
 It seems on earth; it seems in air;—
 Near it seems, and then remote;
 Still repeating the same note.

Spirit of the dusky hill!
 Wand'ring, goblin Whippoorwill!
 Art thou some gray Satyr old,
 Of which Grecian fable told;
 Or the Dryad of the wood
 Wailing in thy solitude?
 That thou art; but yet so altered;
 And thy tones so wildly faltered;
 And thy nature so disguised,
 Thou canst not be recognized.

Prophet of the dusky hill!
 Necromancing Whippoorwill!
 Art thou boding harbinger—
 From the dead a messenger?
 Where the rocks with mosses gray,
 Look like castles in decay,
 Frowning on the sombre hill—
 Haunting, ghost-like Whippoorwill!
 Oft I listen to thy tone,
 As the night grows still and lone;
 And the moon's broad lights are shed
 On the trees high over head;—
 Listen to thy wizard song,
 Leaves, and moss, and rocks among,—
 Echoing in the shadowy dell,
 Like Sibyl's voice from out her cell.
 Each note's hollow as a knell,—
 Mournful as the last farewell,—
 As a sad and last farewell!

I have trespassed too long on your patience to quote further examples of his style; but, as his book is now quite accessible, those who would pursue the inquiry may be interested in knowing that the poem "Louisa" (p. 59) is addressed to the sister of one he loved and lost; "Our Schoolhouse" (p. 120) relates to the picturesque site and surroundings of Annandale, one of Sadsbury's most attractive spots. The last stanza in the book is a reflection of his characteristic mus-
 ing:

"The white Moon is crowning yon dis-
 tant hill;
 In the sky's pale azure away so deep,
 Lo! the stars are watching, serene and
 still,—
 'Tis a night for dreams—not a night
 for sleep!"

His Personality.

Who, then, was this personage whose work briefly perfumed and then perished on the desert air? What were his education, his experience, and his compensation? Let a few cold facts

inform the inquirer: His mother was a Bowers; his father was James Brown; the elder James and his brother, William, kept a country store in Eden township, on the road from Mt. Eden furnaces to Mount Pleasant. His only brother, Hiram F., like himself, never married. He was born in 1826, and his early education was of the "pay school" system, in which the Scotch Irish masters usually figured, though his mother was a woman of intellectual force and directed his early training. She sent him to New London (Chester County) Academy, a classical school of standing in that day. History, the languages and English poetry were his delight. He became a teacher, and, though not a churchman, delighted to call the attention of his pupils to the Bible, as a well of English undefiled—especially the book of Isaiah. As a private instructor he was more of a teacher than disciplinarian. He was diffident, but when he spoke in public he said something; and he delighted in the Lyceum.

George F. Baker, who was one of his pupils, makes this valuable contribution to my all too imperfect sketch:

"He had great concentrativeness; and when he was hearing a class recite, he became so absorbed in the subject that he did not notice much what the other pupils were doing. Therefore, his school at times was pretty noisy. He took great interest in the old-fashioned game of corner ball; and although he was not an expert player, he often became so absorbed in the game that he forgot to 'call school' at the appointed time. He was well versed in mythology, and ancient and modern history; conversant with the writings of the great literary authors of ancient and modern

times. If there was any reference in the recitation to any character in mythology, history or literature, he could at once explain it fully. I frequently heard him in public debate. He was a forcible and earnest speaker, and clear reasoner. He was a very good conversationalist. He was a firm believer in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. I remember that Mr. Brown, another gentleman and myself spent a night together at a neighbor's house, when there was a death in the family. Conversation turned upon the inspiration of the Bible, and I never heard or read such a clear and forcible exposition of the authenticity of the Scriptures as he gave us that night. In religion I think he was a fatalist. I form this opinion from hearing him in public discussion on the subject of man's free agency, and also from a passage in one of his poems, entitled 'The Dream,' in which he says:

"There's no effect without sufficient
cause;
And like conditions would have like
results.
Man must fulfil his course—dark destiny!
Fear, hope and doubt, and strong necessity,
And circumstances, to him are Fates,
that urge
Him on in darkness, where he gropes
his way
With slow, blind steps, even to the
grave."

"He was a Democrat in politics, but never aspired to any office. He kept himself well informed as to the principles of the different political parties, and upon all the current topics of the day. Mr. Thomas Scanlan, one of Mr. Brown's teachers in the public school, told me James Scott Brown was the brightest pupil he ever had. Mr. Brown told me he had written another work, but did not get it published, on

account of the cool reception his 'Boquet and Other Poems' met with.

"I called recently on the lady who kept house in the Brown family for the last forty years, and she told me she had seen the manuscript of the unpublished work, and it was prose; but she did not know anything about the subject or character of the book."

When Mr. Brown was a young man he paid attention to a good-looking and bright young lady in this neighborhood; but some trouble arose between them, and he never married.

Whether it was disappointment in love, disappointment in the popular reception of his book, or inherent appetite, he fell into some of the easy habits of genius; and the latter part of his lifetime was divided between reflection, musings and occasional visits to the "Nine Points." He was honest, pure and clean in all his tastes; and abhorred profanity or obscenity.

Although Mr. Brown and his brother let their farm, it was their custom, in a busy time in harvest, to assist the tenant getting in the crops. Mr. Brown was engaged in this work during the harvest of 1890, when he was thrown from a load of hay; one of his legs was broken and he was otherwise injured. His physician did not consider his condition critical and hoped for a speedy recovery. But he only lived nine days after he received the injury. Death did not result from the hurt, but from heart failure. He is buried in the U. P. graveyard at Octoraro.

Did ever anyone, here, there or anywhere, so fairly win and fitly wear the elegiac tribute of Thomas Gray in his matchless classic of the English tongue:

"Oft have we seen him at the peep
 of dawn
 Brushing with hasty steps the dew
 away
 To meet the sun upon the upland
 lawn.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding
 beech
 That wreathes its old fantastic roots
 so high,
 His listless length at noontide would
 he stretch,
 And pour upon the brook that bab-
 bles by.

"Hard by yon wood, now smiling as
 in scorn,
 Muttering his wayward fancies he
 would rove,
 Now dropping, woeful-wan, like one
 forlorn,
 Or crazed with care, or crossed in
 hopeless love.

"One morn I missed him on the 'cus-
 tomed hill,
 Along the heath, and near his favor-
 ite tree;
 Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
 Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood
 was he:

"The next, with dirges due in sad ar-
 ray,
 Slow through the church-way path
 we saw him borne.
 Approach and read (for thou canst
 read) the lay
 Graved on the stone beneath yon
 aged thorn:"

THE EPITAPH.

Here rests his head upon the lap of
 Earth
 A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame
 unknown.
 Fair Science frowned not on his hum-
 ble birth,
 And Melancholy marked him for her
 own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul
 sincere,
 Heaven did a recompense as largely
 send:
 He gave to Misery (all he had) a tear,
 He gained from Heaven ('twas all he
 wished) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
 Or draw his frailties from their
 dread abode,
 There they alike in trembling hope
 repose,
 The bosom of his Father and his
 God.

